

ON LOGIC OR THE CYCLE OF THE RHINOCERO

According to our judgment, the most important event in the realm of thought from 14th century up to Renaissance was the dissolution of omni-comprehensive systems of thought, so to speak. This dissolvent process became more noticeable in the British islands, with a Franciscan friar – William of Ockham— but it took its most irritant virulence with Sir Francis Bacon¹ three centuries later in London. Those years were the long and painful funeral of the scholastic body, either Catholic or Protestant; and we are saying “long” and “painful” because it took centuries before such a corpse rested in peace, and this only for a while. First of all, and almost at the beginning of the Christian tradition, it was Saint Augustine who gave a definite divine status to philosophy. In his manual of exegesis of the Scriptures, *The Christian Doctrine*, the bishop of Hippo says:

“And yet the validity of logical sequences is not a thing devised by men;...for it exists eternally in the reason of things, and has its origin with God.”²

Because of Saint Augustine’s authority, philosophy or logic got a wide room into religious matters, and because of his colossal figure, those human disciplines enjoyed an unlimited veneration among Christian apologists centuries to come. Second of all, we must take into account what happened fifteen centuries after the North African Augustine declared the Holiness or Sanctity of Logic: Hegel and his attempts of resurrecting the scholastic corpse in his *Science of the Logic*. Here again like Augustine, the cadaverous Logic restarts to talk in a pastoral tone to all those seminarians who were deeply traumatized by Kant’s philosophy. Verily, Hegel’s *Logic* sounds like a sermon or pastoral advice:

“Accordingly, logic is to be understood as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought. This realm is truth as it is without veil and in its own absolute nature. It can therefore be said that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind.”³

So we must clarify the supposed unmatched value of Logic by putting on the table our beloved rhinoceroses, a dialogue extracted from the very famous Eugene Ionesco’s play *Rhinoceros*.⁴ It is

¹ Sir Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*: “As for those who have given the first place to Logic, supposing that the surest helps to the sciences were to be found in that, they have indeed most truly and excellently perceived that the human intellect left to its own course is not to be trusted.” In the same thread of thinking, another British thinker, Shaftesbury, says: “The most ingenious way of becoming foolish is by a system. And the surest method to prevent good sense is to set up something in the room of it.” *Soliloquy or Advice to an Author*. Also Quevedo in his ascetic work *La Cuna y la Sepultura*: “Then, look at yourself, exhausted by syllogisms and fatiguing demonstrations; heavily burdened with ill-disposed, shallow Logics; and with natural philosophy –so they call it— being it no more than figments of fantasy and dreamy nuances.” In his *De Genealogia Deorum XIV, IX*, Boccaccio remarks the fictitious character of Logics as well: “If I conceded that poets deal in stories, in that they are composers of fiction, I think I hereby incur no further disgrace than a philosopher would in drawing up a syllogism.” In his *Dr. Faustus*, Marlow shows also his disdain: “Is to dispute well logic’s chiefest end? Affords this art no greater miracle? Then read no more, thou has attained that end.” Closer to us, Dostoyevsky in his *Notes from the Underground*: “But man has such a predilection for systems and abstract deductions that he is ready to distort the truth intentionally, he is ready to deny the evidence of his senses only to justify his logic.”

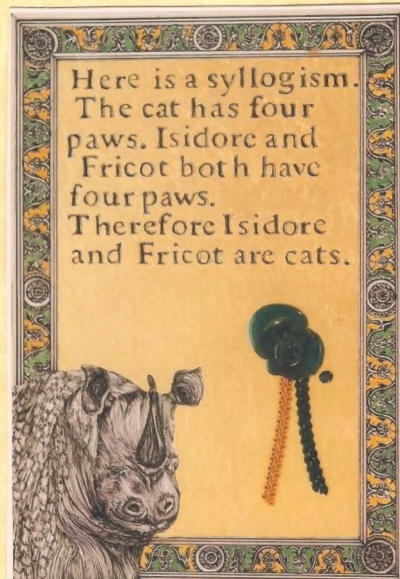
² Saint Augustine, *The Christian Doctrine*. The same idea regarding to numbers in chapter 38: “Coming now to the science of number, it is clear to the dumbest apprehension that this was not created by man, but discovered by investigation.”

³ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*. See also his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, in which Hegel talks about British philosophers –including Bacon— with his deepest disdain.

⁴ May my dear reader keep in her or his mind that Peter Abelard –who violently opposed to that misleading Augustinian mixture of Logic and Metaphysics— was named by his contemporaries *Rhinocerus indomitus*. Very consistent with a good logic: nothing better for fighting a rhinoceros than another rhinoceros!



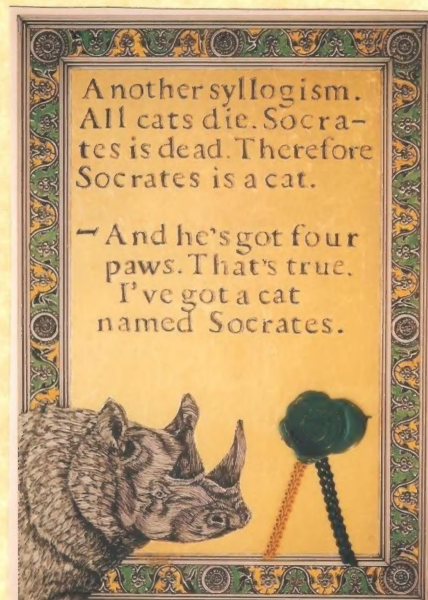
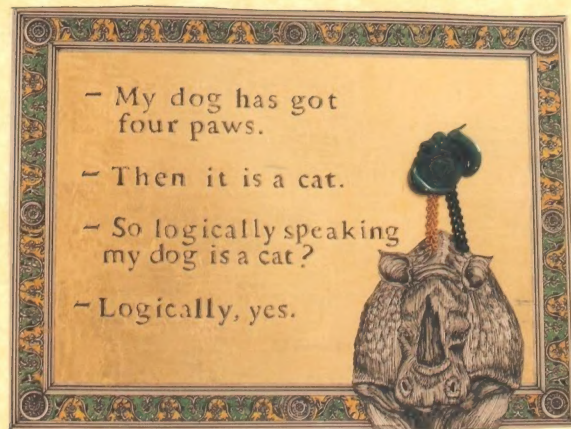
worthy of notice the felicitous coincidence between this horned animal and the horned syllogism, being the latter one on which Luther made mockery against Erasmus or any other of his interlocutors. What is really important here is that Ionesco⁵ paralleled the roughness, the brutality of a rhinoceros with Logic, quite brutal in its own method as well. Curiously enough, even today Logic has its feverish fanatics among Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists. No wonder, then, when Dilthey says: "*Immediately after Luther's death, his writings were totally forgotten.*"⁶

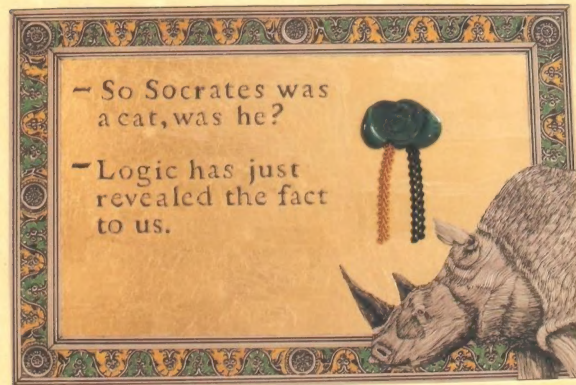


⁵ We find a certain familiarities between Ionesco's rhino and Vives' treatise *In Pseudo-dialecticos*, where the Spaniard humanist recalls their oddities: "Though Varro is a man, yet he is not a man because Cicero is not himself Varro," or this one: "A harlot in a brothel, for many years a prostitute, will be a virgin, and conversely, the most chaste virgin has long been a wrinkled prostitute." Through his lectures at Cambridge, Vives' influence in England was vast.

⁶ W. Dilthey, *From Leibniz to Goethe*. See also Gogarten in his book *The Reality of Faith*: "Unfortunately after Luther, protestant traditions became a rigid dogmatic system."







In addition to these Luther's words⁷, it is necessary to furnish even more this short comment by putting on the table the Huguenot Petrus Ramus, who had straightforwardly rejected those *somnolence's chimera and fascinations of reason* – *chimericae somniorum fascinationes rationem*⁸— Against the Augustinian tide, then, Ramus' conception of Logic was more a "*dialectica naturalis*" or "*scientia artificialis*", with no metaphysical pretensions at all.

⁷ Luther had never quoted Marcus Aurelius. This is a *Rara Avis*' felicitous literary invention, which assembles perfectly into Luther's ideological core. The first part of the quotation about the *horned syllogism* was drawn from *The Bondage of the Will* and from *Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*.

⁸ Petrus Ramus, *Aristotelicae Animadversiones*. We find particularly illustrative what Vasoli says in his *La Dialettica e la Retorica dell'Umanesimo*: "In fact, Ramus was not a philosopher concerned with building one among a variety of hierarchical systems of Reality, to which so fond scholastics were."



Finally, we add a further icon whose authorship is entombed far from us, in darkness forever: Is it an Allegorius' of Sevastopol icon, or a Rara Avis' one? But in any case, what we actually know is that it looks like – as Ramus would have said — “a mutilated, beheaded, and formless monster.”⁹

INTRODUCTION TO LOGIC HORNED SYLLOGISM



⁹ In fact, Ramus' definition of Aristotle's *Organum*.